



## Spanish Violence Denies Democracy in Catalonia

Until Mid-September the Spanish government's line on the looming independence vote in Catalonia had been calm, confident and succinct: **"There will be no referendum on 1 October."**

But police raids of Catalan government buildings in Barcelona saw Guardia Civil officers entering Catalan government buildings and arresting 12 senior officials in run-up to banned independence vote for preparing the referendum.

For the sixth successive year, Catalonia's national day- September 11, **La Diada de Catalunya** – was used as a political rally by the pro-independence movement. Organizers said 450,000 people had registered for the event, and Barcelona police later tweeted that 1 million turned up.

Even before the raids took place in Barcelona, Spain's foreign minister, Alfonso Dastis, a career diplomat with a markedly less confrontational approach than his predecessor, had accused some independence activists of adopting *"Nazi attitudes"* by trying to intimidate Catalan mayors who opposed the vote.

Spain's prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, argues that the unilateral referendum was a clear breach of the county's constitution and that *"no democratic state in the world"* would tolerate such a violation.

the Catalonia president, Carles Puigdemont, tweeted: **"We will not accept a return to the darkest times. The government is in favour of liberty and democracy #1Oct."**

The regional president, Carles Puigdemont, has repeated his determination to declare independence from Spain days after 90% of participants in a unilateral referendum voted for Catalonia to become a separate state.

Puigdemont argues his government has been left with no choice but to proceed unilaterally as repeated attempts to discuss the matter with the Madrid government have been ignored. He also says the referendum results gives him a clear mandate.

At least 893 people and 33 police officers were reported to have been hurt on election day, after riot police stormed polling stations, dragging out voters and firing rubber bullets into crowds.

Tensions are still running very high and many Catalans are angry that the thousands of Spanish Guardia Civil and national police officers who tried to halt the referendum are still deployed in the region.

The King of Spain; Felipe VI, made a rare television address on Tuesday night, blaming Catalan authorities for wanting *"to break the unity of Spain and the national sovereignty."*

*"They have broken the democratic principles of the rule of law,"* he said. *"Today, the Catalan society is fractured."*

He warned that their push for independence could threaten the country's social and economic stability.

He made no reference to Sunday's violence in the speech, in which he said the government had a duty to *"ensure constitutional order,"* and has

criticized the Catalan independence referendum as an act of **"inadmissible disloyalty."**

Puigdemont and other Catalan politicians have made several calls for the EU to intervene to help solve the crisis, but the bloc has so far kept out of what it views as an internal matter for Spain.

Much of Catalonia was brought to a standstill for 10 minutes at midday October 2nd in protest at the police violence. Squares were occupied and roads blocked as crowds chanted "Independence!"

Jordi Cuixart, the leader of the pro-independence group Òmnium Cultural, told the crowd that a general strike called for October 3rd was "the best response the Catalan people can make to the attacks on us yesterday and in recent weeks".

The police operation was criticized by the UN high commissioner for human rights, who said he had been "very disturbed" by the violence in Catalonia.

"With hundreds of people reported injured, I urge the Spanish authorities to ensure thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all acts of violence," Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said.

"Police responses must at all times be proportionate and necessary."

Husseini asked Spain to immediately accept requests for UN human rights monitors to visit the country.

Puigdemont urged the Spanish government to withdraw the national police and Guardia Civil officers who had been deployed to prevent the referendum. He also announced that his government would create a commission to examine human rights violations.

The judge (Ismael Moreno) who is set to decide on sedition charges against Catalan activists for attempting to hold the democratic referendum, has roots that are deeply connected to Francisco Franco (1892-1975), the military leader who initiated the Civil War, won it, and then went on to rule as Head of State and dictator in Spain for almost forty years. Franco is a major figure of twentieth-century fascism in Europe.

**A purge of Francoist government officials never took place when the dictatorship ended in the 1970s, and this leadership has had a lasting impact on how Spain's government makes its decisions about Catalonia, a region traumatized during and after the war due to its resistance to Franco's regime.**

The lingering effects of Franco's legacy are at this point well-documented and need to be a part of the discourse that surrounds what is quickly unraveling in Barcelona.

Over the past week, Spain's military body, the Guardia Civil, has forcibly taken control of the Mossos d'Esquadra, Catalonia's own police force. It has also detained government officials, closed multiple websites, and ordered seven hundred Catalan mayors to appear in court. Ominously, Spanish police from all over the country have traveled up to Barcelona or are en route to the Catalan capital, holing up in three giant cruise ships, two anchored in the city's port, one in the port of nearby Tarragona. They are doing this at a time when Spain is on high alert for terrorist attacks, removing their police forces from numerous regions that could be in danger of attack, including Madrid, in preparation to stop Catalan people from putting pieces of paper into voting boxes.

Like the Spanish government, the Spanish police force was never purged of its Francoist ties following the dictatorship. It is a deeply corrupt institution.

Manuel Fraga Iribarne, one of Franco's ministers during the dictatorship, founded Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party. The party is currently enmeshed in a corruption scandal of its own. Spain's royal family is similarly linked to Franco and has also been brought to trial for its own set of corruption charges.

It is impossible to ignore the fascist bedrock upon which modern Spain is founded, or to ignore the

reality that this foundation has to do with the way Spain treats Catalonia. And yet we on the outside continue to make excuses for Spain, often conflating its problems with Catalonia to a squabble about taxes.

The Spanish Constitution, which was written in 1978, as a way of backing up Spain's dictatorial assertion that the Catalans have no right to self-determination and that the referendum is illegal. The part of the Constitution that says Spain is indivisible was added not by the "fathers" of the Constitution, but by the military, as Jordi Soler Tura, one of two Catalan founders of the Constitution explained in 1985. Following the creation of the Spanish 1977 Amnesty Law, a law still active today, there has been no investigation or prosecution of the massive human rights violations that took place in Spain under Franco's fascist dictatorship, and this was the same environment of suppression and authority in which the current Constitution was written.

Franco died peacefully in his bed at age eighty-two after ruling over the country as dictator for almost half his life. Let's imagine Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) dying peacefully in his bed sometime in 1971 following decades as Germany's Nazi leader. We likely cannot imagine this scenario, but it is exactly what happened in Spain. Franco and Hitler were both fascists who engaged in the mass murder of civilians for the purpose of "cleansing" their societies of those they believed to be of an inferior race or a threat. Franco in fact wrote the novel behind the movie, *Raza* (Race, 1941), which promoted the idea that *hispanidad*, or Spain's superior race, comprised of those who were in line with Nationalist sentiment. The big difference between Franco and Hitler is that Franco won his war and Hitler lost his.

Under Franco, there were concentration camps in Spain too, and many Spanish political prisoners were sent abroad to Nazi camps in Germany and Austria, or ended up in internment camps in France.

Thousands of the people who were tortured or sent to the camps were Catalans. During the years of Franco's dictatorship, Catalonia was one of Spain's strongholds of resistance, and the Catalan people suffered enormously for it. Following a military trial in 1940 that lasted less than an hour, Lluís Companys (1882-1940), the president of Catalonia's Generalitat, or its system of governance, was tortured and then executed by the Guardia Civil. Companys is a symbol for what the Catalans endured during and after the Civil War. Many were murdered, disappeared, imprisoned, sent to concentration camps, had their children stolen, or were economically disenfranchised during these periods. Catalan people were also banned from speaking their language and saw other aspects of their culture suppressed by the fascist regime. Teaching and speaking of the language became legal only after Spain's restoration to a democracy in 1978.

Rising above their past, the Catalan people have flourished in the twenty-first century and are the main contributor to Spain's economy. Barcelona and the larger region are renowned for their industrious and creative workers. The Catalan language and its culture are thriving. The Catalan people should not be confused with the Basques, whose militant organization, the ETA, has been responsible for much bloodshed in Spain. The Catalans have a history of peaceful and communal resistance to the Spanish government, a tradition that continues today. The referendum that they seek is part of a basic democratic process, just as was the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence in the United Kingdom.

Franco was victorious and did not lose his war, as Hitler and Mussolini lost theirs, but this must not mean that we should let the dictator's toxic ideological infrastructure persist any further into the twenty-first century. Supporting Catalonia is a necessary step in putting an end to fascism in Europe.

**based on reports from  
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